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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Herzl Inbar, Israeli Charge d'Affaires
William H. Hallman, Political Counselor,
American Embassy, Buenos Aires

DATE : December 6, 1979

PLACE : Israeli Embassy, Buenos Aires

SUBJECTS : Anti-Semitic Threats, Alleged PLO Activities in
Argentina, Buenos Aires Herald Editor Robert Cox

Allegations of Threats. I reminded Inbar of persistent stories that threats of reprisals had been made should Jacobo Timerman -- now living in Israel -- publish accounts of his treatment here at the hands of the Argentine government. According to one version these threats came from the Argentine government, or at least from one of that government's mysterious elements. Specifically said to have been threatened -- according to these stories -- were Herald editor Bob Cox, Rabbi Marshall Meyer, Rabbi Roberto Graetz and Mr. Timerman's brother José. (The Ambassador had talked with Inbar briefly on the subject only the night before. See also Buenos Aires 9327 of November 14 regarding previous notices of these threats.

According to a most recent account, Mr. Timerman himself had mentioned these threats to an Argentine visitor who saw him recently in Jerusalem. He also had spoken of them in an interview in New York with Rabbi Marshall Meyer, Rabbi Rosenthal of the Anti-Defamation League and a Rabbi Yudovich.

Inbar said that no threats had been made to him or, to his knowledge, to his Embassy, his government or to other members of the Argentine Jewish community. He said that he had himself decided shortly after Timerman's departure from Argentina that it would be inopportune from a number of points of view that the former editor of La Opinion should immediately publish articles describing his treatment at the hands of Argentine authorities. How, asked Inbar rhetorically, could publication of these events improve the Argentine political situation, or help any of the people here who presumably have Timerman's sympathy? (Comment: The political situation was intricate and difficult here following Timerman's departure. The case was catalyst for an abortive army revolt and it threatened to affect the outcome of the debate over who was to replace General Viola

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as Army Commander -- a hardline general or one with more moderate views.) Inbar communicated his reservations about Timerman's possible activities to colleagues at his Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, and he said that he was aware that his views had been made known to Mr. Timerman. He denied however once again that his judgment had been based upon threats to individuals or to the Jewish community, but said rather that his reading of the situation was based in his understanding of the larger aspects of the Argentine political situation. (Comment: One can imagine that the subtlety of Inbar's message could have been lost as it was transmitted from one person to another at his Ministry and finally was given to Mr. Timerman. The addition of "threats" to specific people still in Argentina as an impediment to his speaking out in Mr. Timerman's subsequent account seems difficult to account for.)

Alleged PLO Activities in Argentina. I asked Inbar whether he had heard rumors that a recent oil deal between Iraq and the government of Argentina had included -- at Iraqi insistence -- permission for certain Palestine Liberation Organization activists to work here in Argentina. Inbar replied that his understanding was that no such deal had been concocted. In fact, during a recent visit by Syrian parliamentarian Mohsen Bilal, the Syrian had been told by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in response to his request for the PLO to be recognized here, that such an event was impossible. (See also Buenos Aires 10116 of December 11, 1979.) Inbar's information was that the Ministry had given to the Syrian visitor lists of PLO people known to be in association with terrorist Montoneros, and told him that the terrorist connection precluded any Argentine association with the PLO.

Inbar said that he had also received information that recently a crudely produced mimeographed letter was received at the Presidency from PLO leader Yasser Arafat, asking for recognition of his organization. The Casa Rosada rejected the suggestion out of hand and sent the communication to the Ministry Foreign Affairs for further handling. The Ministry is now deciding whether simply to ignore the letter and deny any stature to Arafat's group, or to present a verbal reply through the Argentine Embassy in Beirut or Damascus.

Inbar said however that someone without sufficient background in Argentine affairs could have misunderstood a recent column in the right wing "La Nueva Provincia" of Bahia Blanca, which in reporting the Argentine-Iraqi oil deal speculated that

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given the usual incompetence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the deal probably included permission for the PLO to operate. The acid comment of the newspaper was in keeping with its usual disparagement of the Foreign Ministry, not a news item, Inbar said.

Bob Cox. I asked Inbar how he viewed Bob Cox's departure (at least temporarily) from Argentina amidst accounts of his being threatened by people believed to be members of the security forces. Inbar said that he believed that Cox's departure had something to do with the Timerman release, but through a rather strange process: for as long as Timerman was in Argentina he was public enemy number one for right wing, fascist-oriented Argentines in and near the security forces, who found in Timerman all that they hated in a liberal journalist's approach to life and politics. With Timerman no longer in Argentina they simply turned their attention to the next largest target -- Bob Cox, known for his support of human rights causes, his liberal views on several subjects, and his support for Timerman. Cox's situation was complicated, Inbar felt, by the fact that the same people were those least able to read a newspaper written in English.

Inbar added that those who hate Cox think he is a Jew, and to my incredulity replied "they think anyone who supports liberal causes and Timerman is a Jew." Inbar claimed to have fashioned his opinion from conversations he had had with several staff people who "read the newspapers" for high-ranking military bosses. Harguindeguy has such a newspaper reading staff, Inbar explained, as does Viola -- the Navy -- etc. These people do not simply give resumés of what the newspapers are covering but attempt to go behind the scenes and account for why one paper takes a certain line, publishes a particular press item etc. Among these groups, Inbar asserted, Cox is cordially hated. Inbar doubted out loud that it had been Navy security people who wrote the threatening letter to Cox's son Peter was the major factor in Cox's decision to leave Argentina. Inbar suspected that it was "someone in the Buenos Aires Province police force or, possibly, some security service with continuing close ties to General Camps."

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